

Folkbildning and Sustainable Development

1. Summary of “Education for Sustainable Development” (SOU 2004:104)	2
2. Excerpt from “Education for Sustainable Development” (SOU 2004:104)	8
3. Folkbildning for International Solidarity and Sustainable Development	13
4. Sustainable Development – Adult Education for Generations	16

Folkbildningsrådet
Box 730, 101 34 Stockholm, Sweden
www.folkbildning.se
2006



Folkbildningsrådet

Summary of “Education for Sustainable Development” (SOU 2004:104)

Summary

The world is facing great challenges that are of concern to all people and all countries. Poverty, climate change, epidemics and war are examples of the problems barring the way to sustainable development, globally as well as nationally and locally. The problems are complex and embrace economic, social and environmental factors. Solutions presuppose a holistic approach in which measures that are undertaken in different areas are mutually reinforcing and in which everyone assumes responsibility.

Developments in society, combined with the knowledge that the present generation bears the responsibility for ensuring that future generations in every country in the world will be able to meet their needs, demand immediate vigorous measures. Learning is a prerequisite if mankind is to be able to meet the challenges facing the world. What people learn and how they put it into practice is crucial for whether sustainable development can be achieved. The Committee’s assignment

At the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, Prime Minister Göran Persson announced that Sweden would host an international meeting on education for sustainable development. In May 2003, the Government appointed a committee on education for sustainable development to review and analyse how education systems at all levels work to promote development that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The assignment included the organisation of an international meeting on education for sustainable development. It also included submitting proposals to stimulate the spreading of ideas connected with sustainable development throughout the education system.

The concept of sustainable development

In many parts of the world today, people organise their societies in ways that create economic, social

and environmental problems. Awareness of existential threats has increased over recent decades and has led to international efforts to find joint solutions to development issues. Certain progress has been made, but many problems remain unchanged – or have worsened. In Chapter 1, we attempt to clarify the concept of sustainable development. The concept became well known through the work of the Brundtland Commission which was appointed by the United Nations in the mid-1980s. The Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept is based on a holistic view of the needs, situations and problems of people and their societies. The underlying principle is that economic, social and environmental conditions and processes are integrated – they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Sustainable development is about safeguarding the resources that exist. A sustainable society is a society that is permeated by democratic values. Citizens feel they can participate, that they can influence the development of society, and that they have the desire and ability to assume responsibility for doing so. Society is shaped within the framework of what the environment and human health can tolerate. Citizens have equal opportunities irrespective of sex, socioeconomic and ethnic or cultural affiliation. Sustainable development is also about the efficient use of resources and the long-term management of and investment in human, social and physical resources.

In recent decades, a number of international meetings have been held in which solutions to development issues have been discussed. In this chapter, we detail five milestones in international efforts to achieve sustainable development: the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm; the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission); the

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro; the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals; and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg. Since the Rio conference, educational issues have become increasingly important. The awareness that learning is central to sustainable development has emerged.

Sweden has taken an active part in international work in this area and has formulated a cohesive policy for just and sustainable global development and a national strategy for sustainable development. Education has a prominent role in the national strategy and is a theme in the main features of global policy, social development and security. The Government has also established a special unit at the Prime Minister's Office which is responsible for coordinating work on sustainable development at all the ministries and which will be proactive in national and international efforts. International consultation on education for sustainable Development.

In accordance with the Committee's terms of reference and Prime Minister Göran Persson's initiative at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, the Committee organised an international consultation on education for sustainable development in Göteborg, Sweden, on 4–7 May 2004.

Some 350 participants from 75 countries and five continents took part. The consultation was entitled Learning to change our world: International consultation on education for sustainable development. Lessons learned from the consultation are presented in Chapter 2. The consultation demonstrated that education for sustainable development is a concept open to many interpretations. A number of obstacles to education for sustainable development were identified during the consultation. The second part of the consultation focused on discussing strategies to overcome these obstacles. A number of suggestions at local, national, regional and global level were generated. Some of them were detailed and concrete, others more general. The participants expressed a strong

desire to move forward the issue of learning for sustainable development.

The consultation may be seen as part of a process that uses broad international dialogue to chisel out the role that learning and education can play when societies are being reoriented towards sustainable development. The last ten years have seen the emergence of a global dialogue on education for sustainable development and there are signs that a common understanding is beginning to take shape. One important conclusion to be drawn is that there is a great need to continue this dialogue at local, national, regional and global level. Together, stakeholders within as well as outside the field of education need to seek a common understanding of education's role in achieving sustainable development.

Characteristics of education for sustainable development

Education for sustainable development should aim to empower students with the ability and the desire to work towards achieving sustainable development locally and globally. We note that this places demands on what education covers and how it is designed. In our view, the content – the “what” – of education for sustainable development must be based on local as well as global perspectives and processes and on the connections between them. International dialogue has drawn particular attention to a number of key global areas that should have a central place in the content of education for sustainable development. These areas include, for example, peace and security, human rights, gender equality, cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, health, natural resources (such as water, energy, agriculture and biological diversity), climate change, and poverty reduction.

In Chapter 3, we identify some of the features that should characterise education for sustainable development.

- Many multifaceted illustrations of economic, social and environmental conditions and processes should be dealt with in an integrated manner by using interdisciplinary working methods.
- Conflicting objectives and synergies between different needs and interests should be clarified.
- Content should have a long-term perspective extending

ding from the past to the future, from the global to the local.

- Democratic working methods should be used so that students can influence the design and content of educational programmes.
- Learning should be reality-based with close and frequent contact with nature and society.
- Learning should focus on problem solving and stimulate critical thinking and readiness to act.
- Both the process and the product of education are important. Education for sustainable development in practice

In Chapter 4, educational content, working methods and results are described and assessed from a sustainable development perspective. The review is based mainly on material available from earlier studies. The choice of course content from a sustainable development perspective has not been studied to any great extent at national level. Accordingly, the data for working methods and results is stronger than the data for course content. The emphasis of the chapter is therefore on working methods and results rather than on content.

Pre-school, school and adult education

The overall assessment of pre-school, school and adult education shows that there is a great diversity of working methods and that there is a large variation between the different sectors. There are, however, indications that there is scope for broader implementation of the working methods we have highlighted as being key in education for sustainable development, that is to say working methods characterised by a high level of pupil participation and a democratic approach.

The reality-based learning demanded by education for sustainable development appears to be inadequate. Contacts with the local community have been few and far between, although it would appear that the reform of adult education in recent years has resulted in the strengthening of such contacts. Many Swedish schools have formed international connections but these international efforts are, to a great extent, dependent on committed enthusiasts. International cooperation takes place largely within the EU and

the OECD and only to a lesser degree with developing countries.

There appears to be scope for greater interdisciplinary cooperation. Interdisciplinary working methods appear to be most common in pre-school and the earlier years of compulsory school. In the later years of compulsory school and at upper secondary school, interdisciplinary cooperation is not so common.

Many institutions have begun to focus on environmental issues and this has meant that important steps have been taken in education for sustainable development. We note, however, that the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions that we consider necessary has still not made itself felt on any wider front. Teachers are expressing uncertainty about how the sustainable development perspective should be made more concrete in educational activities and teaching situations and are seeking relevant in-service training. Studies suggest that young people have good knowledge of the democratic system and of the basic values of society, but there are shortcomings in the application of these basic values. A holistic approach and critical thinking are considered to be poorly developed qualities among the young, according to the studies. The review in the chapter shows that young people in Sweden are more interested in taking part in political elections than young people in comparable countries. The tendency to take an active part in social change is, however, less pronounced among young people than it is among adults. There are also signs that young people's interest in politics is declining. But this could be connected to a distrust of traditional forms of activity since many young people say at the same time that they are interested in development issues and the environment.

Young Swedes seem to have a more tolerant attitude towards homosexuals and immigrants than the young people in most other countries. Furthermore, young people are more tolerant than adults. Pupils do abuse each other, as do adults and pupils, even though most teachers and pupils say they are happy and feel secure in their daily activities.

In the studies presented in the chapter, girls appear to be more motivated and better prepared to contri-

bute to sustainable development than boys. Girls express a greater desire to influence their education, they know more about democracy and human rights, have a greater capacity for holistic thinking, are more tolerant and abuse others to a lesser degree.

Higher education

As regards higher education and education for sustainable development, the review in the chapter shows that the more or less comprehensive work being carried out at universities and colleges provides a good basis for promoting work on sustainable development. In our view, given the efforts made so far by higher education institutions, considerable development work is required. We note that many of the different working methods in higher education match the characteristics we have established for education for sustainable development. There is, however, scope to increase the influence undergraduates and post-graduates have on their courses of study.

Higher education contacts with the local community are extensive but contacts further afield need to be better integrated into education. Universities and colleges have, in general, welldeveloped international contacts but one limitation is that these contacts are, to a great extent, directed at countries in the western cultural sphere.

Sustainable development work is usually based on an environmental dimension where many important steps have been taken. Higher education work is aimed largely at direct environmental impact, whilst less attention is paid to the indirect impact that takes place through education. There are also difficulties in developing the interdisciplinary working methods that education for sustainable development demands. Educational results indicate that studies often lead to good general knowledge and reflection on personal values. Many students and postgraduates say, however, that their education has not led to any particular increase in their desire to become active in social development.

Liberal adult education

Liberal adult education has strong traditions in the use of democratic working methods. This ideal matches the characteristics we have established for

education for sustainable development. The high level of voluntary participation and the low level of external demands appear to provide the prerequisites necessary for developing democratic working methods. Even if the great ambitions in policy documents and policy declarations seem difficult to fulfil, liberal adult education appears to be characterised by a high level of student influence, and democratic working methods seem to be common.

Liberal adult education has traditionally been very active in its contacts with the local community. Folk high schools and study associations have made good use of participants' active interest and have played an intermediary role between citizens and authorities. There are indications, however, that these contacts may have diminished in recent years. This applies particularly to Agenda 21 activities. There are also signs that contacts with the local community have changed in character. In the past, liberal adult education served as a way of channelling collective processes aimed at bringing about social change. Nowadays, it seems to be more a way for individuals to realise their various aspirations. Folk high schools and study associations have many international contacts. Most common are contacts with Nordic and Baltic countries, Africa, South America, Eastern Europe, India and Sri Lanka.

Liberal adult education provides a wealth of courses dealing with topics relevant to sustainable development. Recently, study programmes and courses focusing solely on environmental issues have given way to more interdisciplinary courses that combine economic, social and environmental aspects.

There is much to suggest that the great importance of liberal adult education for those who take part has to do with helping increase their self-esteem and their capacity to act. The effects on students' desire and ability to take action in achieving sustainable development are more difficult to demonstrate. Neither do students appear to be attracted to liberal adult education in order to develop their competence in democratic action. Studies suggest that the groups taking least part in the democratic process, primarily immigrants and the unemployed, are also the groups that are least represented in liberal adult education.

It should be noted, however, that during the 2003 academic year, 30 per cent of participants in folk high school activities and 20 per cent of participants in study association activities were immigrants or people with disabilities.

Governance for sustainable development

In Chapter 5, the report concentrates on political governance. We present our assessment of whether the governance systems for the school, higher education and liberal adult education sectors promote education for sustainable development.

The common factor for the systems of governance for these sectors is that they are described as goal- and result-oriented systems. There are, however, essential differences between them as regards both their traditions and the level of state governance. The Government's role differs between the three types of education system, for example, and the degree of scope available on a local basis also varies. One interesting area for continued study is the prerequisites for education for sustainable development that the different systems of governance provide.

The report shows that the systems of governance within the education sector provide good support for education for sustainable development in certain respects, but do not send sufficiently clear signals in others. For the most part, education sector provisions contain potentially great scope for those who teach and those who study in the different education systems to take an active part in the choice of content and working methods. The elements of these provisions that can be described as basic values highlight the values that are essential for sustainable development, such as democracy, gender equality, respect for other people and respect for the natural environment.³ The concept of sustainable development is not highlighted in any of the provisions in the higher education sector or in liberal adult education. When sustainable development is addressed in statements of objectives for the school sector, it is from an environmental perspective. The necessary integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions is missing. A surfeit of objectives at many different levels creates problems in interpretation and setting priorities and this appears to be one of the reasons

that the leadership provided by documents such as curricula and syllabuses is often weak. The resource distribution systems in the field of education are complicated. In our view, it is essential to focus further studies on the opportunities they provide for education for sustainable development. It is particularly interesting to consider how quality enhancement can be more clearly linked to the distribution of resources and which combinations of qualitative and quantitative criteria best support education for sustainable development.

The Committee's assessments and proposals

The Committee submits the following assessments and proposals.

- Instructions to agencies in the field of education should be amended so that their activities promote education for sustainable development.
- Dialogue on education for sustainable development between stakeholders within as well as outside the field of education needs to be developed and deepened.
- Inquiries should be conducted to shed light on the importance of informal and non-formal learning for sustainable development.
- Public research funders should be asked to provide further support to interdisciplinary research, particularly on sustainable development and education for sustainable development.
- Basic training and in-service training for those engaged in teaching activities in the field of education should aim to strengthen knowledge of sustainable development and how education can promote sustainable development.
- The Education Act (1985:1100) will be amended to specify that education will promote socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development. This means development to guarantee present and future generations a good environment, good health, economic and social welfare and justice.
- The Higher Education Act (1992:1434) will be amended to specify that activities will promote socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development. This means development to guarantee present and future generations a good environment, good health, economic and social welfare and justice.
- The Decree on Government Subsidy for Liberal Adult Education (1991:977) will be clarified so as to

ensure that activities promote socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development, which means that present and future generations are guaranteed a good environment, good health, economic and social welfare and justice.

– School curricula need to be reviewed so they provide better support for education for sustainable development.

– Appendix 2 to the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100), the Degree Ordinance, should be reviewed with regard to sustainable development knowledge becoming a requirement for the issue of a degree certificate.

– The criteria for science centre grants should be reviewed so the centres are better able to support learning for sustainable development.

– UNESCO should be invited to establish an institute in Sweden to act as a node in an international network for education for sustainable development.

– A long-term strategy and action plan for work on education for sustainable development over the next ten years should be established.

– A pilot scheme should be established to provide opportunities for stakeholders in the school sector, the higher education sector and liberal adult education to produce methods to permeate the education system with a sustainable development perspective.

– The Government should consider whether there is a need to set up a special proactive coordinating body during the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

To conclude, in Chapter 6 we discuss how the implementation of our proposals should be organised. We are of the view that Sweden's work on education for sustainable development should be seen in an international context and linked to ongoing international processes. Not least, since the United Nations has decided that education for sustainable development will be a priority issue during the period 2005–2014. In addition, we believe it to be important for the success of the work that proactive forces to stimulate and follow the work are mobilised at different levels within and outside the field of education. Experience from earlier reforms has shown that implementation takes a long time. In our opinion, therefore, this work needs support that ensures a longterm perspective and sustainability. The Government should consider whether existing agencies can carry out the tasks or whether temporary bodies should be set up for the purpose.

Excerpt from “Education for Sustainable Development” (SOU 2004:104)

Does adult education support sustainable development?

Which work forms are being used?

Studies of the work forms used in Swedish liberal adult education (*folkbildning*) have most often been qualitative in nature. It is therefore difficult to give general descriptions of which work forms dominate. The studies that have been conducted, however, have resulted in similar observations in a number of areas. The National Council for Adult Education has evaluated the efforts of the adult education system in the area of democracy. In the report, it is concluded that structures for formal democratic influence are well-developed at adult colleges (hereafter “folk high schools”, from the Swedish *folkhögskola*) and study associations (*studieförbund*). At folk high schools, there are various clubs and societies for participants. There can also be student- and course advisory groups. Often the participants also have representatives on the school’s board. The Council’s view is that the participants’ best opportunity to influence the study associations is through their relation to other study circle participants and the study circle leader. If the participants belong to membership organisations in the study association, they can also influence through the decision structures found there.

Within the study associations, the principal work form is the study circle. A study carried out by a group at the Stockholm Institute of Education concludes that these study circles appear in different forms. The forms vary depending on the study circle’s context, the subject being studied, the conditions under which the education occurs, who the participants are, and who the study circle leader is. The authors of the report think that flexibility is the study circle’s most distinct characteristic. Four components combine to make up a concept for the study circle, which can in many ways be said to be ingenious, namely, the loose framework, the informal character of the study situation, the collective learning environ-

ment, and the participants’ genuine interest in knowledge. The study also indicates that the particular conditions of study circles are decisive for the educational climate. These include the lack of curriculum and grading, and thereby that there are no explicit demands on performance for the participants, as well as the fact that it is voluntary, which contributes to a more relaxed climate.

The adult education system has recently been looked at by a national evaluation committee (*Statens utvärdering av folkbildningen 2004*) known as “SUFO 2”. The final report, *Adult Education in Times of Transition (Folkbildning i brytningstid)*, presents a review of studies on the work forms of liberal adult education. The studies have for the most part been qualitative in design, and the findings indicate that the application of democratic work forms in study circles is not completely unproblematic. The expectations of the circle leaders and participants are often guided by their previous experience of education with traditional work methods. In addition, there are traditions and institutions, for example, manifested in tried methods of organising and the use of previously produced course materials. Often, this leads to the circle leader being given a dominating role in the choice of content and work forms.

Contrasting pictures are seen in the studies reviewed by SUFO 2. Andersson studied a number of study circles formed in a particular context, most often in an association or by a group of people starting a study circle based on a common interest. Andersson found study circles formed in this way to be participant-centred. This means circles where the participants’ civic ability is trained and developed through democratic work methods. The participant-centred circles are often found within the framework of an association or some other groups with common values.

SUFO 2 presents results from only one study that

focused on the work forms of folk high schools.¹⁴⁵ The study illustrates the work forms at two folk high schools and is thus not generalisable to all folk high schools. Hartman observes that interdisciplinary, project-based and group-based work forms are common at the folk high schools studied. However, in his judgement, it is to a large degree traditions, premises and established systems that govern how the teaching is organised. This means that students' influence over the work forms can be said to be limited. The SUFO 2 report concludes in closing that the practical application of the underlying democratic foundations of adult education in study circles and folk high school courses is not entirely unproblematic. Work forms and conditions for adult education are above all influenced by two circumstances. The participants' and leader or teacher's previous experience of education appears to have a guiding effect in so far as known and tried forms of study are used also in the study circle and in the folk high school group. It would seem as though the participants do not know about, or at least have limited familiarity with, the liberal adult educator's ideal of democratic work methods. Their expectations on the role of the leader and the work method often shape the education. The second circumstance involves the subject and the purpose of the studies; there is a difference between school subjects like language and, e.g., study circles in music. In the case of the latter, it is the collective outcome that is crucial. The overall assessment made by SUFO 2 is that adult education has some degree of difficulty meeting its own ambitions of democratic work methods. Still, SUFO 2 judges that the liberal adult education system as a whole is characterized by underlying democratic foundations that come through in its view of the individual and his/her worth. Not least, it is said that the study circle has the necessary conditions for a democratic talking culture that has significant value for democracy.

Local collaboration...

How does the adult education system work with the local community? The National Council for Adult Education indicates that study associations and folk high schools have been very active in regional cooperation within the framework of Agenda 21, though the Council points out that this activity in Agenda 21 has fallen over the past years. SUFO 2 shows that

there are few studies looking at adult education in a local context. In former years, the adult education system was about people striving through popular organisations to stake out a new future for their movement and for society as a whole. SUFO 2 suggests that collective processes of this type have increasingly been replaced by more individual-oriented interests; today's study circles rarely involve influencing society. However, this does not prevent study circles from playing an important role in that participants develop a common understanding and share interests that concern their own communities.

SUFO 2 emphasises a number of examples of efforts where adult education's collaboration with the local community have been developed and augmented. There are study circles in which politically active participants take a step toward the public realm and act in a political role. Other examples are circles that, based on national study materials, make the connection to the local level. One such circle was a health circle designed in cooperation with a county council and the county adult education association. This study circle used material on the difficult choices in health care (Vårdens svåra val, SOU 1995:5). An evaluation of the work done in the circle concludes that it provided both the participants and the authorities with new knowledge. This type of circle is mutually beneficial in that the study associations are able to "channel the needs and views of citizens to the decision makers." They can also serve as a resource when decision makers seek citizens' views on certain issues. The study associations are ascribed a mediating role.

According to SUFO 2, adult education should form a more distinct part of the local public arena. Studies of social conditions could stimulate increased participation in public debate. Study associations should be able, more so than they are at present, to stimulate and support study groups to be active in public life – and globally.

The National Council for Adult Education concludes that study associations and folk high schools are involved in many international cooperations. The most common of these are cooperations with other Nordic and Baltic countries, Africa, South America, Eastern Europe, Sri Lanka and India. Contacts with

the countries of Eastern Europe have increased. In the years 1990–2000, 46 folk high schools and five study associations worked together with Baltic and Polish contracting parties on 65 projects. The purpose of the projects was to a large degree to exchange experience and increase knowledge about one another, but also to spread the methodology of liberal adult education as a tool for democratic development or language acquisition. Several projects had the goal of establishing a sister organisation. In 2003, nine folk high schools operated courses abroad. It can be noted that many international projects are carried out together with volunteer organisations.

Does adult education have a content that promotes sustainable development?

In connection with the Baltic 21 Education process, a mapping was conducted of the adult education system's work toward a sustainable development. The investigation showed that all study associations and 61 percent of the folk high schools felt that they had activities in the area of sustainable development. The National Council for Adult Education pointed out that there were few courses and projects in adult education's offering that went under the title of sustainable development, but many of the courses and programs addressed aspects of a sustainable development. Among other things, this included studies specialising in ecology, public health, and international topics focusing on development assistance work.

The Council also notes that many folk high schools no longer offer the courses that address only environmental issues, which reflects a reduced interest in purely environmental issues among adult education's participants. Instead, the trend is toward integrating environmental issues within the framework of courses with a broader focus. Consequently, many folk high schools have created courses that integrate social, economic and environmental dimensions.

What outcomes does the education lead to?

A review of studies that have focused on the adult education system's democratic task is presented in the Adult Education in Times of Transition report. When it comes to study circles, the investigating committee draws the conclusion that the circles contribu-

te to opinion building among participants and their individual ability to take action, but that there is doubt as to whether they can be considered a body for collective and coordinated action for the purpose of social change. The conclusions from the earlier cited study by the group at the Stockholm Institute of Education point in the same direction. The authors of this study suggest that the study circle has a host of different meanings for the participants. Among other things, they offer knowledge for business and pleasure, enrichment of leisure time, social resources, and personal development. The circle's democratic function, however, is seen as poorly developed. Effects on the participants' democratic competence are indirect, for example, the insight that one's self esteem increases and courage is boosted through participating in a study circle.

In another study, 160 people were asked whether the study circles meet the high expectations of adult education, of giving people what they need to gain influence and work toward an equal distribution of power in society. Based on the available research on leaders and leadership roles, Larsson concludes that study circles are the educational activity that best meets the requirements of civil society. People themselves choose what they want to study and they are also free to study social issues based on different fundamental values. At the same time, all of the population is not represented in the circles. The groups with the lowest participation in the democratic process, above all immigrants and unemployed persons, are also those shown to be outside of the study circle community. Larsson therefore concludes that the circles work best as a base upon which to build relations between those included in an already favoured majority. Larsson suggests that the influence of the study circle as a collective can seldom be shown in the studies conducted. The effects that can be shown are at the individual level in the form of increased self confidence and a stronger ability to take action. Larsson indicates, however, that the lack of collective action has less to do with the circle having failed as a work form. Rather, it has more to do with a weakening of the power base of civil society. He summarizes that the study circle can be the watering hole needed in a society that places increasingly less emphasis on equi-

ality, solidarity, democracy, identity-building, and personal development.

Corresponding studies on the role of folk high schools in democracy are difficult to find. Those studies that do exist focus to a large degree on the internal democracy of folk high schools and say little about the activity's importance for social development. SUFO 96 did take up democratic aspects. There, students stressed that there was room for democracy in the immediate environment – in the teaching and during lessons – but it was worse when it came to the democracy in the school as a whole and the conditions of the students in society.

In the studies conducted within the limits of SUFO 2, interviews with students indicate that democracy is not something they give a lot of thought to. When telling about their studies, the interviewees seldom mention democratic aspects. It seems reasonable to believe that the main reason for enrolling in adult education is not a thirst for democracy. It would seem, however, that many people turn to adult education as a means of seeking confirmation as members of a democracy. The conclusions of the SUFO 2 committee regarding the significance of the adult education system is that it makes an important contribution to preserving and developing a democratic society.

Conclusion and assessments

Democratic work forms common

The liberal adult education system has a strong tradition of using democratic work forms. The adult education ideal is in close agreement with the characteristics that we have formulated for education for sustainable development. The high degree of voluntariness and the low degree of external requirements appear to provide good conditions for developing democratic work forms. Even if the high ambitions of policy and regulatory documents appear difficult to fulfil, we are able to conclude that adult education is characterised by a high level of influence from the learners and that democratic work forms are common.

Local and global collaboration

Folk high schools and study associations have often channelled people's involvement and played a mediating role between citizens and authorities. Contacts

with the local community have been numerous, though there are signs that these contacts have decreased in recent years. This applies above all to the activities in Agenda 21. There are also signs that the contacts with the local community have changed in character in recent times. Throughout the 1800s and first half of the 1900s, liberal adult education served as a tool for citizens to change society. Now, it appears that adult education is more a way for individuals to realise different life projects.

Folk high schools and study associations have many international contacts. The most common are contacts with Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and India/Sri Lanka. It also happens that Swedish adult education organisations build sister organisations in other countries.

Integration and interdisciplinary study becomes more common

The adult education system offers many courses that deal with areas relevant to sustainable development. In recent years, courses and programs that focus only on environmental issues have given way to courses of a more interdisciplinary nature that integrate economic, social and environmental aspects.

Important for the individual, but not as important for democracy

There is much to indicate that, for the individuals that take part, the great significance of adult education lies in its contribution to raising self-esteem and the ability to take action. Effects regarding the learner's will and ability to take action toward sustainable development are more difficult to show. Neither do the learners appear to seek adult education in order to develop their democratic action competence.

The groups that demonstrate the lowest participation in the democratic process, above all immigrants and unemployed persons, are also those who are least represented in the study circle community. It is however worth mentioning that 30 percent of the participants in folk high school activities and 20 percent of study association participants are immigrants or people with disabilities.

Reflections

We conclude that, from a sustainable development perspective, the knowledge on work forms, content and outcomes is insufficient. Few studies have looked at the education system's contribution to sustainable development.

The regular systems for follow-up are not set up from the perspective of sustainable development. The picture we have drawn is therefore fragmentary and not at all comprehensive. Moreover, it is difficult to make comparisons between what has emerged regarding the different forms of education, since the studies we surveyed were not conducted such as to allow comparison.

We would therefore like to point out that there is a large need to develop studies and forms of regular follow-up that shed light on the education system from the sustainable development perspective and

that allow comparison between the different educational forms.

Some general observations we would like to emphasise:

- There is uncertainty concerning the concept of education for sustainable development.
- There is much room for improvement of the students' influence, to make work forms more democratic.
- There is a great need for more extensive collaboration with the local community.
- An extensive international contact network exists with countries in the Western cultural sphere, while contacts with the rest of the world need to be developed.
- The education needs to be developed to better support the learners' will to take action toward sustainable development.

”Folkbildning” for International Solidarity and Sustainable Development

Introduction

The document *Folkbildningens Framsyn* was published in 2004 and submitted to the Swedish Government. The document *Folkbildningens Framsyn* is about what role and which objectives “*folkbildning*” – the Swedish liberal, non-formal and voluntary education system comprised of folk high schools and study associations – shall have in the future. The text is a result of a comprehensive process involving 117 conferences nationwide at which 7,000- 8,000 people participated.

The Swedish study associations and folk high schools have a unique position as independent, nonprofit organisations. Every study association and folk high school has its own conceptual foundation, operational emphasis and target groups. Yet, among study associations and folk high schools there exists a common view of the fundamental prerequisites of *folkbildning* work as a non-profit, free and voluntary organisation. All want to continue to safeguard this in the future.

International solidarity and sustainable development are important elements in the *folkbildning* of the future. The local and global perspectives must be

When the Swedish term *folkbildning* is used in this text, it refers to the folk high schools and the study associations, i. e. the organisations that constitute the liberal non-formal and voluntary educational system in Sweden. The term ‘*folkbildning*’ is difficult to translate into English. It is sometimes translated as liberal or popular adult education. However the specific conceptual foundation of ‘*folkbildning*’ extends beyond the term ‘adult education’, which is why ‘*folkbildning*’ is used in this text as-is. (Sw. *Folkbildning*: Sw. ‘folk’ means ‘people’, Sw. ‘bildning’ means ‘enlightenment’).

combined in the daily work. *Folkbildning*’s organisations have expertise and readiness to play an active role in this area in the future.

Here is a text from the document *Folkbildningens Framsyn* which focuses on international solidarity and sustainable development:

The fight against poverty and global threats to the environment are the issues of greatest concern in our times. In the work for sustainable development, decision makers, organisations and individual citizens the world over will be called to make active efforts.

Basis of future efforts

An important basis of *folkbildning*’s efforts in the work for sustainable development is to take advantage of and use the expertise developed in other areas; as teachers, cultural sponsors and as an engine for local involvement and development work as well as teachers of the leaders and teachers of the future. Another basis is to not view issues of sustainable development and global justice as being separate from other activities – as something that is isolated or done “on the side”. Instead, it is about including new perspectives in all activities. This is ultimately an expression of the need for issues of global justice and sustainable development in the future to be integrated into people’s daily awareness, and our way of thinking and acting.

Accordingly, fundamental mentality, value and life style adjustments will be needed to handle global issues of survival. Of course, such changes cannot be made over night. But a long-term and far-sighted strategy for sustainable development must also embrace this ambition.

A great deal also speaks for more and more people gaining insight into the necessity of fundamental changes in our way of life in the wealthy part of the world. Increased travel and the fact that Sweden is a

multicultural society contribute to opening people's minds. It is becoming obvious to more and more people that long-term, sustainable development must include ecological, social and economic dimensions. *Folkbildning's* organisations shall meet this interest with unbiased curiosity.

Future objectives

Folkbildning's organisations have the expertise and preparedness to play an active role in issues concerning global justice and sustainable development in the future. The efforts shall primarily be concentrated and deepened within three areas:

A guide and inspiration at home

For *folkbildning's* part, the work for global justice and sustainable development starts at home, among people in the local community where study associations and folk high schools are driving social actors. It is a matter of developing effective methods to get more people involved in global issues, based on the insight that people's interests and conditions are different. There is no single way to go, but rather many entrances to increased involvement are needed. Some examples of such entrances can be:

Meeting people's needs for knowledge

In the future, folk high schools and study associations shall meet the citizens' interest and desire to learn more. Issues of sustainable development can, as previously mentioned, be weaved into many different contexts. But an offering that directly ties into issues of global justice and sustainable development is important. Here, the folk high schools can build on an established tradition, for example when it comes to the training of aid workers and foreign information officers.

Showing the way from word to deed

Many people want to see their efforts provide obvious and clear results. Such an involvement can for example be expressed through concrete environmental efforts, work for equality, support of fair trade and practical solidarity work.

Meetings that provide in-depth knowledge

Folkbildning has great possibilities of arranging meetings between people from different parts of the

world. Cultural activities and individual creativity can often be a "door opener" and bridge language gaps. Pedagogical methodology development for cross-border meetings is a future objective for *folkbildning*. Here, information technology can also play a unifying role.

Travel with added value

Travel is increasing. More people are seeking different experiences and deepening insights into how people live and what conditions and obstructions exist to development. Here, study associations and folk high schools can play an important future role for increased awareness and to develop alternative forms of travel with educationally formative elements.

Active partners in development efforts

In Swedish development cooperation, non-profit organisations are given a prominent role. A significant part of the Swedish development assistance is channelled through various volunteer organisations. Here, folk high schools and study associations are prepared to accept greater responsibility as initiators and active cooperation partners in the future.

Already today, both folk high schools and study associations conduct comprehensive international development efforts in the form of direct development projects, exchanges, etc. These efforts often tie into the profiling that exists within each respective study association and folk high school.

National and international public opinion work

Folkbildning's efforts for global justice and sustainable development shall, as mentioned, have a clear focus on local work.

This primary focus must in the mean time be supplemented with active work to bring about changes on a more structural level. In the same way that *folkbildning's* organisations must become more active in the national socio-political debate in the future, further efforts are needed to play a role in the international arena.

The need for international public opinion work is increasing in stride with economic and political globali-

sation, and as a result of international decisions having consequences on a national level. The collective *folkbildning* – and even individual schools and study associations – shall play an active role here. In the future, international contacts and networks will become an increasingly natural part of *folkbildning's* daily work.

In this way, the local and global perspectives can also be unified. Out of this, an insight will hopefully grow that the global issues of concern will be decided by the ability to make politically progressive decisions – and by every individual's ability to accept increased individual responsibility in their daily lives.

Swedish National Council for Adult Education Conference 2005:

Sustainable Development

– Adult Education for Generations

The purpose of the conference was to improve conditions for adult colleges (hereafter “folk high schools”, from the Swedish *folkhögskola*) and study associations (*studieförbund*) to work toward sustainable development in their activities. The point of departure was that sustainable development forms a central task for adult education both now and in the future.

The aim of the conference was to:

- Provide deeper insight and new perspectives on sustainable development.
- Stimulate the development of methods and content to work towards sustainable development in adult education.
- Serve as a meeting place.

The conference was for administrators and others in charge of operations at folk high schools and study associations as well as organisations and institutions that work closely with adult education.

Material for the conference

The Liberal Adult Education Net’s resource pages published material on sustainable development in the form of articles, interviews, films, etc., that could be used by the participants in preparation for the conference.

After the conference, conference proceedings and other documentation were also posted here and these webpages will now also be used to publish material on an ongoing basis about continuing work in adult education for sustainable development. Visit the Liberal Adult Education Net website at: www.folkbildning.se, or resource pages at: <http://www.resurs.folkbildning.net/page/3366/temasidahallbarutveckling.htm>

Conference press release

“Adult education plays a vital role in learning, and for the entire development toward a sustainable society.”

These are the words of Britten Månsson-Wallin, General Secretary of the National Council for Adult Education that just held a national conference on the theme of Sustainable Development.

“Sustainability issues have to be solved with action, and the ability to take action lies in the adult education organisations with their strong connection to association activities and society,” says Månsson-Wallin.

At the beginning of the 1900s, liberal adult education and the popular movements played a vital role in the development of democracy, equality, and access to education. It was a challenge with a long-term perspective. Today, society faces a new big challenge: we must learn to think and act in a long-term perspective to create a globally equitable and sustainable welfare society. And once again, adult education is accepting the challenge – a challenge that extends across generations.

The challenges that working with Sustainable Development entails, can be likened to the challenges faced by the earlier popular movements. Now, as then, it is not only about changing one’s own living conditions, but is just as much about working towards a goal that will benefit future generations.

The ethnomics dilemma

At the adult education conference, Håkan Hydén spoke about the importance of changing norms and presented a “ethnomic” way of thinking. According to Hydén, ethnomics entails taking a responsible, value-based and long-term economic perspective to existence.

“Our economic system developed in an epoch when nature didn’t constitute any restriction. We have quite simply overdrawn from this account, without reflecting on it. The negotiability in society has led to humans being over-exploited now too, something we

are not morally prepared for. We need to seek the aid of ethics.”

During the conference, delegation members from all over the country worked on so-called “ethnomics dilemmas”, i.e., the difficulties that can arise when individual ethics meet social norms and economic questions. In today’s mass communications society, we have learned to view many assertions as truths, as a foundation for our societal cooperation. But we are continually confronted with situations that challenge these assertions, situations that we circumvent, manage via rules and system solutions, or reflect upon by ourselves individually.

Facing dilemmas challenges how we conceive things and we are forced to reflect along new lines. For example, is the need for economic growth a universal truth? Have I, as an individual, a responsibility for what happens to my coworker, or for women’s position in the world...?

The method of using dilemmas is linked to the liberal adult education tradition that requires active listening and a respect for different types of experience and knowledge, i.e., an open and equal dialogue.

The missing oar

Stefan Edman, author, debater and national investigating expert, took part on the big screen and spoke about the Swedish boat’s “missing oar”:

“Sustainable development is like a boat being rowed with two oars – a technology oar and an ethics oar. In

Sweden we are good at the technology oar, but we also need an ethics oar. Without it, we just row in circles. We have to work with our values, knowledge, nurturing and education. And who is better at this than the Swedish adult education system that works with strengthening the individual’s ability to take action.

That sustainable development does not apply to the environment alone was clear at the adult education conference. The concept has to do with integrating issues such as environment, equality, integration, health and poverty in an overall perspective.

“It’s about thinking through how we want to solve these dilemmas at all levels of society – locally, nationally, and globally. If you’re impoverished, there’s little you can do apart from trying to survive as best you can, but in the West we have significantly greater options to choose from. We should therefore also devote more time to these issues,” thinks Benton Wolgers, a teacher and course coordinator from the Red Cross Folk High School attending the conference.

The conference represents an important kick-off for adult education toward a society where ethics and values are given room based on the will, knowledge and opportunities of individual people.

We can’t drum and blast our way to a sustainable future. It is consideration, reflection and broad participation that will open the way.

Folkbildningsrådet

Box 730, 101 34 Stockholm

Tel: 08-412 48 00, fax: 08-21 88 26

fbr@folkbildning.se

www.folkbildning.se